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The changing “soul” of Dutch policing

Responses to new security demands and the relationship with Dutch tradition

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to address the changing organization and culture of the Dutch police over the last decade.

Design/methodology/approach – Drawing on personal observation, desk research and a survey among the police and administrative elite in The Netherlands, the paper describes, analyzes and reflects upon developments which are out of tune with the Dutch tradition.

Findings – From the 1960s onwards, The Netherlands was famous for her pragmatic, decentralized and friendly style of community policing. The slogan “the police are your best friend” summarizes the “essence” or the “soul” of Dutch policing. Increasingly, however, the typically tolerant, friendly and social policing style has come under pressure. The system of relatively independent regional police departments has been fiercely criticized because of the lack of effectiveness and efficiency in solving crime, safety and security challenges. National government now wants a much bigger say in setting its police programs and priorities. Moreover, as elite government officials stipulate, the police must be more “tough” on crime and terrorism. This attitude has led to centralization, penalization and, at the local level, responsibilization, which signifies that a variety of private, (often profit-seeking) policing agencies and companies are made responsible for public order maintenance. Such changes are leading toward a “state-centered” police model at some distance from citizens, a development that is seen as contrary to the social soul of Dutch policing.

Originality/value – The paper offers an analysis into the changing “soul” of Dutch policings.

Keywords Community policing, Law enforcement, The Netherlands

Paper type Research paper



Introduction

This paper is an attempt to capture the “soul” of Dutch policing in relation to the pressures of the new demands on national security. The methodology used is quite unconventional and subjective. Our search for a “soul” of policing in The Netherlands has been inspired by the observation of Dilip Das, the American author of this paper. He conducted research on the Dutch police in early 1990s and, like some other scholars, he was struck by the friendly and decentralized character of the police. Drawing on Das’ insightful studies, Leo Huberts and Ron van Sedan, the two native Dutch authors, have supplemented his explorations with recent findings and together we present a

brief assessment of the policing situation at the edge of a new era. The results of a survey will be presented in order to clarify and understand the view of elite government officials – i.e. mayors (or burgomasters), chief constables of police and head public prosecutors – responsible for the current reorganization and reorientation of policing, public of private, in The Netherlands (Huberts *et al.*, 2004)

The nature and organization of policing in The Netherlands appears to be changing rapidly. Public confidence in the police is diminishing fuelling a mood of dissatisfaction and crisis. Under the center-right governments of the recent years, Dutch politicians have been urging for the centralization of the so-called ineffective and inefficient regional police system. Throughout the current reform process the government also acknowledges non-state agents and agencies, more in particular commercial ones, to be active players in maintaining livable and safe environments – an acknowledgement associated with Garland’s (2001) “responsibilization strategy.” The open domain of streets, roads and parks, is progressively controlled by private security guards, neighborhood watches and electronic surveillance cameras. Under these circumstances, as Pakes (2004) puts forward, Dutch criminal justice is pulled into a pretty sinister crime complex (Garland, 2001) of combined public and private order maintenance and punishment strategies.

These trends are not particularly surprising, given that American and British criminal law policies have much earlier utilized punitive crime fighting tactics to manage today’s fears and discontents, but – and that is what interests us most – the Dutch policing and justice apparatus has traditionally been associated with pragmatism, tolerance and a sympathetic distaste for “anything which smacks of militarism” (Wintle, 1996, p. 194). British criminologist David Downes (1988) praised what he considered a humane post-war penal regime in The Netherlands. But, what he also pointed out, the spreading of crime and fear around the country could possibly cause a watershed in the characteristically Dutch-style handling of offenders. In this sense, Downes proved to be right. Approaches in crime control now succeed so quickly that The Netherlands seems to drift toward the opposite side of the previously progressive ideal. Opponents of what is happening to overall policing strategies or, as some prefer to say the “governance of security” (Johnston and Shearing, 2003), despair that the essence or soul of Dutch policing is changing inevitably and irreversibly.

In the pages that follow we first delve into the idea of Dutch police officers “taking a liberal approach, avoiding where possible the social exclusion and stigmatization of offenders and aiming rather at integration and normalization” (Wintle, 1996, pp. 181-2).

First, it is explored how officers operate in their daily work. For gaining a better understanding of what they do, we refer to the different policing styles, with the dominant style aiming at pragmatic pacification and non-confrontation instead of repression and coercion: an illustration of the maxim, “the police are your best friend.” This philosophy of policing, albeit altering significantly, fits well with the Dutch culture of consensus, equality and relative harmony (Andeweg and Irwin, 2002) – not suggesting that the police are totally immune from misbehavior and corruption (Punch, 1985; Huberts and Naeyé 2005).

Second, our paper provides an overview of the organization and practices of the Dutch police over the last decade. The focus is particularly on the slow but sure centralization of its decentralized structure, which today includes 25 regional setups and two special police units active at the national level. Additionally, we dwell on the fact

that the Dutch police organization is characterized by its dual system of authority and control. We explain that the mayor and the public prosecutor are the local officials who have the authority over the police and explain that, at the national level, the Minister of the Interior and the Minister of Justice hold special power and responsibilities.

Third, our paper discusses recent developments in the character of Dutch policing. These boil down to a deepening split between “unorthodox” state-centered, punitive policy on one hand and multi-agency clusters of public and private crime control on the other. The criminal justice apparatus has gained prominence, while, simultaneously, the police are no longer seen as the “sole guardian” responsible for public order (Punch *et al.*, 2002, p. 69). New discourses on security and policing have emerged. Governmental bodies, civil initiatives and predominantly commercial institutions merge into “police extended families” (Johnston, 2003, p. 185) safeguarding urban spaces.

Fourth, we show that shifts toward “centralization,” “penalization” and “responsibilization” are recognized at the elite level of the Dutch police system. Their ideas, preferences and expectations are somewhat conflicting, but have generally revealed that the three tendencies mentioned above will have inevitable consequences for the social “soul” of Dutch policing. The Netherlands seems underway to a country that no longer deserves her reputation for tolerance. In fact, the criminal justice state expands at the expense of a, unlike in the years gone by, more socially and community-minded paradigm (Pakes, 2005).

Finally, we attempt to explain why this could all happen so quickly and almost unobtrusively. Answers lie in, probably populist-driven, safety politics sailing “on the compass of fear” (Van Swaaningen, 2005, p. 294). Because of the dramatic rise of crime rates over previous decades, and because of the feelings of insecurity and uncertainty spreading through society, people feel serious discontent with the lack of presence and poor performance of police officers who are accused of spending much time on bureaucratic tasks (paper work) instead of on their key role of safety and security providers. Moreover, in a fundamental way, the traditional emphasis on prevention (and not on repression) is collectively questioned. A too soft representation puts the legitimacy of police officers under pressure. What this might mean for the future “soul” of Dutch policing will be discussed in the concluding paragraph.

A progressive society

The Netherlands is a small country (42,000 square kilometers) with approximately 16 million inhabitants, a vital economy and a stable democratic system based on diplomacy, negotiation and consensus. Up to the 1960s and also in the 1970s, this system was characterized by “pillarization” (*verzuiling*). It refers to a four-fold, religiously inspired division between a Protestant, a Roman-catholic, a Social Democrat and a “neutral Liberal pillar” in the low countries. Furthermore, the concept of pillarization also refers to the so-called *poldermodel* of consensus-based policy-making at all levels of society (Lijphart, 1968; Blom, 2000). In political terms, this meant a solid government elite above deep cleavages among the people. For order maintenance, the police could rely on fairly aloof and strict municipal setups (*gemeentepolitie*) in conjunction with a national force (*Rijkspolitie*) for the sparsely populated rural areas.

However, from the 1960s, as emancipation and secularization waves and, migration influxes took their toll, the calm but paternalistic Dutch culture altered dramatically. Ultra-conformity crippled down to disintegration resulting in emphasis not on

hierarchical (vertical) but on equal (horizontal) relationships between citizens and public authorities such as the police. These developments, in short, laid the foundation for a fairly peaceful multicultural society and a fairly even distribution of wealth and power. In the words of Punch *et al.* (2002, p. 64), The Netherlands represented one of those “progressive Societies” with a strong welfare state, enlightened attitudes to social issues, and lenient approaches to crime and punishment. Mutual respect, tolerance and the avoidance of repressive actions had become central values in The Netherlands. These are values that have shaped the internationally admired (and sometimes maligned) “strong social element” (Punch *et al.*, 2002, p. 75) encapsulated in what have, at least for the last 30-40 years, consider the “soul” of public policing activities. A hallmark in this respect was the 1977 report *A Changing Police* (Politie in Verandering; POS, 1977), which stressed the importance of a professional police organization with a submissive role. A basic assumption behind the considered community-based orientation was to achieve better public acceptance and legitimization of the police. Albeit “community policing” remains a pretty vague and contested concept, it advocated closely-knit associations with local populations and reinforcement through informal social controls (Ponsaers, 2001). This assured robust ties between police officers and the citizens they were expected to serve.

Pragmatic policing

It is not easy to grasp what the police are actually doing, what “real” police work is (Bayley, 1994, p. 5). Like elsewhere in the world, Dutch officers perform countless tasks (e.g. patrolling, emergency assistance, ticketing for offences, and directing traffic), while being confronted with all sorts of people and urgent problems that require different treatments. Following Bittner’s (1990, p. 251) eloquent summary, the police’s unique competence consists of dealing with events containing “something-that-ought-not-be-happening-and-about-which-somebody-had-better-do-something-now.” They are professional street-level bureaucrats (Lipsky, 1980; Reiner, 1997) who enjoy relative autonomy from their superiors to respond quickly and sort out complicated situations.

Few years ago, Van der Torre (1999) conducted an intensive observational research on daily police work in two basic units of the Rotterdam Police Force, the second largest city in The Netherlands. His studies claim that four archetypal types of police officers can be distinguished: The pragmatist, the pessimist, the restorer of order and the social worker. Firstly, the pragmatic type takes a practical, common sense approach to daily conflicts. He (or she) is generally accepted by a wide network of people and uses his contacts for informal problem solving. Finding reasonable solutions, not callous law enforcement, is the *raison d’être* here. Secondly, the pessimist has a fatalistic outlook. This police officer thinks crime is a normal phenomenon of urban life, so his efforts do not really matter. As a result, the pessimist has a resigned attitude of avoiding problems and his social connections are limited. Thirdly, the restorer of order tries to nail wrongdoers wherever he meets them. This type of officer has deep moral beliefs and a sturdy reputation of punishing through street justice. Finally, the social worker is a police officer who identifies himself as a gentle and understanding person, spending much of his energy in assisting and helping people. For him, therefore, the police organization stays, in any circumstance, too strongly committed to stringent order maintenance.

In line with what Jones (1995, p. 40) depicts as a “culture with a predisposition towards compromise and accommodation,” it is not amazing that Van der Torre (1999) concluded that most (circa 65 percent) of the Dutch police officers could be described (and often saw themselves) as officers with a pragmatic style of policing. Neutralizing potentially contentious situations, they tried to keep away from legalistic approaches as much as possible. Instead, police officers’ capacity to intervene successfully depended heavily on their communication and persuasive skills. One of the tactical strategies in panel policy, then, was to condone (gedogen) deviant behavior. Political preferences to treat, for example, coffee shops and prostitution with permissiveness are widely known (and more than often heavily criticized) internationally. Moreover, “community safety” and “crime prevention” referring to “all measures and policies that seek to increase public safety and are oriented at the social context in which crime emerges rather than at the punishment of offenders” (Van Swaaningen, 2002, p. 261) had long been central concerns on which police priorities were set. Officers were dedicated to lowering crime rates and enhancing (subjective) safety within a social justice framework.

Structure of policing

Remarkably, the structure of Dutch public policing did, with exception of the German occupation from 1940 to 1945, not change much for over a hundred years (Jones, 1995, Chapter 3). The 1851 Municipalities Law (Gemeentewet) grounded a highly fragmented array of 148 municipal forces and a national force for the countryside. Earlier on, in 1814, the Royal Military Police (Koninklijke Marechaussee; KMAR) was set up to function as a nationwide operating force carrying out both military and civil police tasks. Almost immediately grave concerns were raised about the ineffectiveness of the police system, but, despite such concerns, no especial change occurred during the twentieth century. The Dutch police proved to be an extremely conservative organization.

After long running and continuous debates, the 1993 Police Act took effect in April 1994 response to endemic crises attributed to the local patchworks of police services (Wintle, 1996). Currently, the country is split up into 25 police regions and two national forces (see below) employing around 50,000 officers. Roughly, 85 percent of these employees serve on a full-time basis. Women account for about 18 percent of the police (Ministry of the Interior, 2000a, p. 8). The size of each regional force varies from about 600 to 6,500 officers, depending on the population density and crime level of a region. Most regions are divided into a number of districts, which are, in turn, subdivided into a number of police units. These units (or police departments) cover small areas to help develop solid contacts with local residents. In addition, alongside the Royal Military Police, the Dutch Police Agency (Korps Landelijke Politiediensten; KLPD) was instituted for the supervising the national infrastructure (motorways, railways and waterways), nation-wide crime investigation, providing expert support to the 25 forces and safeguarding the Royal House. The KLPD, in short, exceeds the activities of the regional police administrations and serves as a coordinator for police authorities involved in order maintenance and criminal investigation (Ministry of the Interior, 2000a, b).

Today’s regionalized system occupies a middle ground, a position between having one national police organization with local branches, and local forces enjoying a larger dose of autonomy within the boundaries of national regulation. However, what has remained largely unresolved, are the problems arising from the dualism of local and national forces and the dualism of shared authority over the police exercised by the

mayor and the public prosecutor (Wintle, 1996). These two bipartite distinctions are still enshrined in law and, as discussed next, promote political disputes about the desirability of a centralized police system until the present day.

The changing
“soul” of Dutch
policing

Call for further reform

Regional boards have turned out to be problematic institutions within the Dutch political-administrative system (Muller, 2002). The core of this problem concerns the delegation of responsibilities for administration (finance and personnel) and authority (tasks and deployment) in police matters to several bodies and functionaries. At the national level, the Minister of the Interior takes responsibility for funding and organizational matters of police regions. The Minister of Justice, on the other hand, is also involved because of his responsibility for the work of public prosecutors. In essence, this system separates assorted powers over the police among different branches in order to guarantee democratic governance.

The oversight and management of the police is delegated to 25 regional boards (regionale colleges) consisting of the mayors of all the municipalities within the force area. The mayor of the largest municipality in each force area is the chief regional manager (korpsbeheerder) of a regional board. He participates with the regional chief constable and chief public prosecutor in a system of triangular consultation and decision making (driehoeksoverleg). They meet with all mayors in the region and establish policy on the distribution of finance, personnel, vehicles and buildings. Once general decisions are made mayors, police chiefs and public prosecutors implement policies at the municipal level (Van Steden and Huberts, 2006).

A central objective of the 1993 reorganization was to combine a close relationship between police officers and citizens with integrated units at the regional level to tackle serious crime and improve coordination between different agencies (Jones, 1995). In a sense, this reorganization weakened the mechanisms of democratic accountability, as locally elected municipal councillors lost their direct influence over policy issues to the regional boards. Direct democratic control over the police has yet always been absent in The Netherlands. The main governing functionary for police forces – the mayor – is, after all, appointed by central government instead of being elected by votes of citizens (Jones, 1995).

Nonetheless, what really matters for the power over policing is that even though the law only permits regional boards to decide on police organization and finance, their actions also directly influence policing policy. The separation between administration and authority is, in other words, difficult to maintain in practice. This ambiguity about the demarcations between responsibilities has stimulated a concentration of powers within the regional boards, while, at the same time, proper supervision over these boards is almost lacking (Van Steden and Huberts, 2006). Thus, in term of accountability, the Dutch police administration suffers from a structural democratic deficit (Huberts, 1997), with police forces retaining considerable autonomy in setting their own policy priorities.

In response, the Centre-Right Balkenende II coalition initiated a state commission (Leemhuis-Stout, 2004) to advise on improving the effectiveness, efficiency, flexibility and transparency of the current police system. One of its main proposals was to sustain the 25 regions, but hand over local responsibilities surrounding administration to both the Minister of the Interior and the Minister of Justice. The mayor and public

prosecutor stay formally in charge of the police (the authority function), whilst in everyday affairs, as opponents apprehend, their priorities and decisions would be heavily influenced by government programs. For the present government, the commission's advice did not suffice. Its preference is a national police system with regional and local branches having a limited amount of autonomy. Parliamentary decision making about these proposals will have to wait until after the forthcoming elections in November 2006.

Changes towards "mixed" policing

In the early 1990s it became more commonly believed in politics "that traditional Dutch tolerance has gone too far" (Punch *et al.*, 2002, p. 64). This turning point has also slowly influenced the style of community policing practiced by executive police personnel. Initially, beat unstable served as "the friendly cop" whose mandate was broadly defined as "keeping the neighborhood quiet and safe." They took their social function seriously and were very aware of the strong caring element in their work. However, criticism arose concerning the credibility and legitimacy of this type of police methods. Colleagues felt that many beat officers were "loners" and "psychiatrist" not doing "proper" police work (Punch *et al.*, 2002, p. 65).

The Dutch police tried to counter these arguments by introducing community officers (Punch *et al.*, 2002, pp. 67-8) viewed as "street-level leaders" (Vinzant and Crothers, 1998) who occupied a pivotal position between the community they served and the police department. Their aim was to create more extensive cooperation between the police, citizens and a range of institutions such as schools and housing associations. The 1985 White Paper Society and Crime (Samenleving en Criminaliteit; Tweede Kamer, 1985) gave the initial push for this kind of structural change. It promoted a more general sharing of the task of crime prevention and provision of public safety between state and non-state policing agencies. Eight years later, such "responsibilization" strategies were further confirmed when the government promoted the concept of "integral safety" (Ministry of the Interior, 1993) acknowledging the interdependence of local government and civil society, and the reality that multiple of private organizations are involved in the maintenance of an orderly society (Van Steden and Huberts, 2006, p. 17).

Along these lines, the inhabitants of small-scale neighborhoods were progressively seen as active and responsible associates in preserving a livable social environment – a new élan implying that "security is not a matter exclusively for the police" (Ministry of the Interior, 1993, p. 8). As Crawford (1999, p. 25) argues:

... [w]here once the state was expected to hand down an authoritative answer for the problems and needs of society, now we are increasingly witnessing a situation in which those same problems and needs are rebounding back on society, so that society has become implicated in the task of resolving them.

Politicians have been moving towards a much broader concept of policing, in which partnerships among multiple agencies and institutions large and small, have their role. Mutually, public and private players are captured in complex, "nodal" or "networked" governance (Johnston and Shearing, 2003, p. 18) that seek to build enhanced local capacities for reassurance and security. Most strikingly, like in other western countries, the Dutch private security industry has mushroomed rapidly from 10,000 to over

30,000 employees in just about two-and-a-half decades (Van Steden, 2004). While the Dutch parliament was very critical about these developments, the cabinet lately announced that “municipalities are, under strict conditions, allowed to bring private security firms into action for maintaining the order in public domains” (Ministry of the Interior, 2000b, p. 106). Private guards now visibly turn up in, among other areas, neighborhoods, city centers and yacht basins as incorporated members of locally instituted policing partnerships.

According to Ponsaers (2001, pp. 488-92), such a novel view on community-oriented policing along public-private lines tends to overrule the moral values of equality, brotherhood and fairness. Van Swaaningen (2005, pp. 296-7) agrees:

Looking at all these forms of crime prevention “new style” one would think that all the original community safety projects are dead and forgotten, but that is not at all the case. It is striking that nobody has ever said that these were a mistake, and that we are therefore taking a different route now. [...] Words like “neighborhood” or “community” are still widely used in recent policy documents, but the actual practice seems to go another way. The police now refer to themselves as “gatekeepers” who clear the streets of “bad guys” rather than as contributing to community building. [...] We can observe a shift from an inclusive to an exclusive society (Young, 1999).

Elsewhere, Van Swaaningen (2002) is not so pessimistic as he argues that crime prevention and community safety can have a happy marriage in balancing the negative (exclusive) vision of the first with the positive (inclusive) vision of the later one (Van Swaaningen, 2002, p. 261). Yet, greater attention to public fears and anxieties in recent years has bent politicians to the sharpening of crime stopping strategies which increasingly result in steps to banish deviants from society.

Changes towards “firm” policing

In the previous section, we discussed the endorsement of responsibility for crime control on civil society. Peripheral police tasks are redistributed to the commercial security industry, multiplying numbers of authorities, forming alliances and shedding state sovereignty to private organizations. Meanwhile, as Pakes (2005) reports, the Ministry of Justice’s budget rises sensationally with injections of €70 million in 2003 and an expected €200 million in 2008, with the police force growing from 40,000 to circa 50,000 officers in less than ten years time. Somewhat schizophrenically, governments perceive the society to be responsible to defend itself and evoke “zero tolerance” policies on (criminal) nuisances. Politicians come up with such a policy to let citizens know they are protected by a muscular state.

Whether new policy plans are driven by populist considerations or not, the Dutch police system seems to be moving into a more firm and repressive direction. As described in the national government’s report *Towards a Safer Society* (Naar een Veiliger Samenleving) this denotes higher priority to crime fighting, more attention for maintaining public norms and values, more legal competencies for the police, various incentives for competitive policing and stricter performance measurements (Ministry of Justice and Ministry of the Interior, 2002). What are the consequences of these shifts in government tone for the tolerant and community-oriented “soul” of Dutch policing? Have the police really evolved into an instrument of control or are the arguments for an affable force still valid?

In order to help to find out, we conducted survey research among the police elite of The Netherlands, comprising the 25 mayors of the largest municipalities, the 25 police chief commissioners and the 25 chief public prosecutors (Huberts *et al.*, 2004). As already indicated, these tripartite regional consultation boards are, by far, the most powerful actors in determining the content of police strategy, work and organization. The response rate was satisfying. Nine regional police chiefs (36 percent), 11 mayors (44 percent) and 11 prosecutors (44 percent) participated in our research. The first central issue to measure was how fervently regional police elites defend the characteristics of conventional community policing followed by their views on the aptness of crime fighting in lieu of pragmatic and compassionate routines.

From Table I, it can be seen that the answers do not bring much optimism for pragmatic, social and friendly policing. We commented that skills and interactions (i.e. assisting people) were special characteristics of Dutch policing. In spite of this, however, the bulk (58 percent) of respondents indicated this was something to dispose of, albeit an overwhelmingly majority of mayors (91 percent), who are, after all, the country's premier citizens, think that community policing and police assistance needs more balanced precedence. The call for deploying harsher law and order regimes further confirms our conviction that criminal justice policies today are crisis-driven. Almost 90 percent of the survey interviewees personally agreed with the statement that "endeavors against crime have become harsher and harder" with 65 percent expressing that the police should be "more tough" on crime. Indeed, The Netherlands has shed off its lenient image in regard to vice and deviance.

The survey results are in line with Van Swanningen's (2005) observation about widespread discontent and disarray about national security – i.e. crime, terrorism and the influx of foreigners. Emphasis is shifting toward risk profiling, unfolding disciplinary measures, privatization and "responsibilized" public-private partnerships

	Police chiefs (percent)	Mayors (percent)	Public prosecutors (percent)	All (percent)
A lot of police assistance is "welfare" work that officers should abandon	56	55	64	58
Community policing and police assistance deserve a higher priority	25	91	9	42
Endeavors against crime have become harsher and harder	89	73	100	87
I am favoring harsher and harder action against crime and insecurity	89	46	60	65
Harsher and harder crime fighting policies are the result of:				
Increases in actual crime numbers	44	36	64	48
Disappointing results of previous policies	67	55	64	62
Increasing unrest among citizens and in the media	100	82	82	88
Nowadays, politicians are trapped between the citizens' demand for security and the knowledge that government is (no longer) capable of guaranteeing this security	78	82	82	81

Table I.
Elite views on police priorities (percentage that agrees or agrees very much)

that threaten to derail The Netherlands into a closed and incredibly paranoid country. The brazen murder of the daring filmmaker and columnist Theo van Gogh by an Islamic extremist in November 2004, brought the fight against terrorism even higher on political and social agendas as some politicians interpreted it in terms of a war that has been started against us. More resources and powers have now been granted to secret service, police and security organizations, which fundamentally altered the social face of “community safety to a visage of exclusion and polarization”. As Van Swaaningen (2005, pp. 302-3) gloomily concludes:

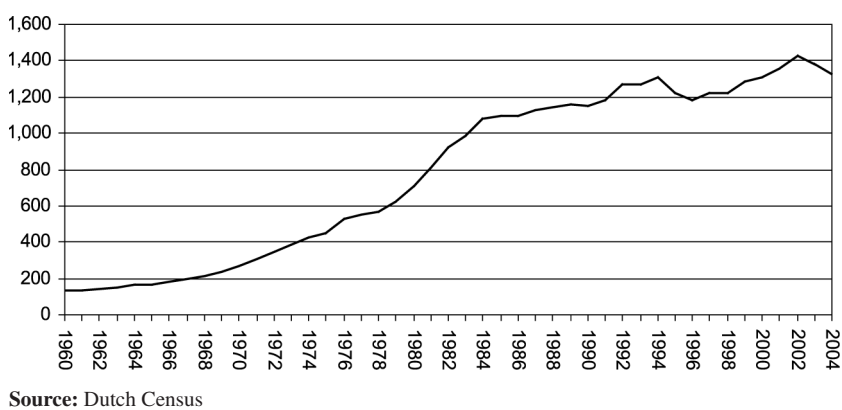
At present, the penal rationale has permeated virtually all measures of crime prevention. “Prevention” now mainly means proactive intervention on the basis of risk profiles. Banishment is the new metaphor of this politics of public safety and the law-abiding citizens are the driving force behind it. The popularity of politicians increasingly depends on “tough” statements on crime and insecurity.

Behind the rhetoric

The rhetoric of Dutch politicians and top functionaries coincides with a negative public opinion about police effectiveness. Research conducted among 90,000 people shows that police officers are increasingly under pressure. Although 53 percent of the respondents are still “very satisfied” with the overall police performance in their neighbourhood, this number has dropped by 9 percent over the last ten years. People complain that the visibility of police officers has diminished and that the police are understaffed (B&A Group and Intomart, 2003). Underlying reasons for reduced satisfaction with police officers are often linked to the dramatic rise of crime in The Netherlands following the mid-1960s. Since, then, the number of reported felony offences has, under influence of progressing economic welfare (Beki *et al.*, 1999), spurred enormously from around 140,000 cases in 1960 to approximately 1.4 million at present. Crime rates have thus increased ten fold (when corrected for population growth, nearly six folded) over the last 40 years, causing a sense of crisis which Pim Fortuyn, leader of a political party named Livable Netherlands (Leefbaar Nederland), attributed to immigration problems, maladjusted asylum seekers, a “backward” Muslim culture and failing authorities (Pakes, 2004, pp. 289-90). Fortuyn was able to strike a chord with this agenda as he was fighting in the national elections, But, he got brutally murdered in May 2002. This assassination shocked the country so deeply that his party indeed achieved victory and participated in government for a short period of time.

Nonetheless, things are not so simple as Pim Fortuyn depicted them. First of all crime rates have more or less stabilized in the last two decades (Figure 1) and, secondly, the influx of foreigners must not be exaggerated as their number dropped over the 1990s (Van Swaaningen, 2005). Van den Brink (2002, p. 7) provides an answer asking us to turn our gaze to the explosion of violence caused by youngsters (including Moroccan and Antillean youngsters). His research suggests that an assertive lifestyle of “faster, bigger, better” lies at the heart of such aggressive spirals. This, in combination with a hunt for “thrills” proud self-esteem and loose moral discipline, creates a perilous atmosphere of hostility, while nighttime leisure economies, drowned in alcohol and lawlessness (Hobbs *et al.*, 2005), in addition to anonymous urban spaces (Lofland, 1973), tend to make the situation even worse. An individualized society seems, as Boutellier (2004, p. 2) formulates it nicely, very sensitive to deviant behaviors:

Figure 1.
Registered crime rates (x
1000), 1960-2004



[A] liberal culture that has elevated self-fulfillment to the true art of living also has to make every effort to stipulate and maintain the limitations of individual freedom. A vital society generates a great need for safety and thus comes up against an undeniable paradox: if liberal freedom is to be unreservedly celebrated, its boundaries need to be set.

Boutellier’s observation fits well into the “risk society” originally sketched by the German sociologist Ulrich Beck (1992, 2000). Where unprecedented prosperity goes hand in hand with a deeply felt fragility (whether in the face of crime, terrorism, migrants or other “hazards”), he says, pursuits for protection and shelter are all-pervasive. Emotions of insecurity and uncertainty have become endemic in our late modern society.

It is commonly assumed that the Dutch police are poorly prepared to meet such fears and anxieties. Not that the police forces are, in absolute staff numbers, overburdened, but attention needs to be given to the allocation of scarce police resources. A study on four similar jurisdictions illustrates that circa 45 percent of the total police capacity is spent on management and office work, 10 percent on criminal investigation, 30 percent on community policing, 7 percent on operational support, 7 percent on responding to emergency calls and 1 percent on other work (Algemene Rekenkamer, 2003): The category of “management and office work” absorbs a huge amount of police capacity (Table II). This must be treated with some caution, because absence through, for example, illness and training is included in the

	Force 1	Force 2	Force 3	Force 4
Management and office work ^a	43	51	48	45
Criminal investigation	9	12	10	10
Community policing	39	31	27	24
Operational support	6	5	8	10
Emergency calls	3	**	7	10
Other work	*	1	*	1

Table II.
Allocation of Dutch police
resources in 2001

Notes: ^aThese numbers include the absence of police officers owing to, for example, illness training or work outside their own jurisdiction; *less than 0.5 percent; ** emergency calls are embedded in other categories

same category. It can yet confidently be surmised that officers spend a lot of time on writing reports, policy-making, communication, logistics and meetings. The Dutch police system is highly bureaucratized. As Manning (1977, p. 15) observed, the drama of the police is unquestionably its “impossible mandate.” Officers must carry out elementary control functions in society, but there are frictions between towering public expectations and the burden they can realistically bear. Police are simply not capable of pledging full reassurance.

All this confronts mayors, police chiefs and public prosecutors with a colossal dilemma. They realize that both citizens and the media are demanding more security than can reasonably be delivered, but there is no escape available. “The predicament (emphasis added) for government authorities today,” Garland (2001, p. 110) comments:

... is that they see the need to withdraw their claim to be the primary and effective provider of security and crime control, but they also see, just as clearly, that the political costs of such a withdrawal are liable to be disastrous.

As a result, public officials are very ambivalent and unsure about the best route to follow. Politicians constantly juggle popular measures against crime with handing over state responsibility to both the free market and civil schemes.

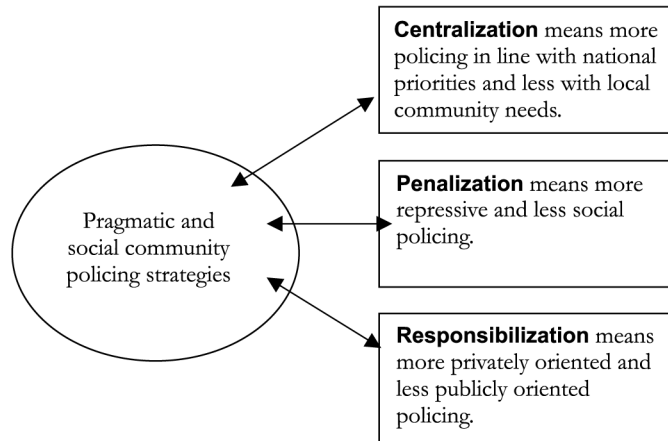
When and if the security trap will lead to a more centralized police system remains unclear. Many police chiefs, public prosecutors and mayors think that a new discussion about centralizing the Dutch police is inevitable (48 percent says “very much”). In addition, 45 percent of these respondents are in favor of introducing more national crime-fighting units, whereas 78 percent of the police chiefs, 82 percent of the mayors and 55 percent of the public prosecutors claim that one integrated national force is not a good plan (Huberts *et al.*, 2004). We should bear in mind that the police elite is working at the regional and local levels in The Netherlands. The proponents of a nationalized police system, alternatively, have their power bases elsewhere. They are to be found in the ministries and in the parliament. To this group belong political leaders who feel the pressure from media coverage, lobbies and forthcoming elections making them more inclined to strongly steer the police at the expense of the regional boards members.

Concluding remarks

The Netherlands, once a country with a reputation of tolerant community policing, appears to be on its way to a punitive and defensive country. What does this imply for the “soul” of Dutch policing? Predicting the future is hedged with caveats. Academics always know better, but only looking backwards. Anyhow, policing, no doubt, is a product of political priorities, needs of the moment, as well as the conventional values of a particular era (Das, 1994). The Dutch are traditionally known for their relaxed and open-minded outlook on deviance, which has shaped a social penal atmosphere. Times, however, have painfully changed. Crime, terrorism and general public fears have caught front-line police officers in a “crossfire” (Wintle, 1996, p. 184) between liberal ideals and burning security issues. This has resulted in tendencies of centralization, penalization and responsabilization as shown in Figure 2.

Even though drifts towards a centralized system of policing are not repressive and unfriendly *per se*, the combination with penalization at the national and responsabilization at the local level may appear to be very influential. In The

Figure 2.
Developments in Dutch
policing



Netherlands, general crime policies are issued at the national level of the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Justice, while community and citizen-based policing is decided upon at the local and regional level. The “hyperpoliticization” (Van Swaaningen, 2005, p. 293) of safety and security may well bring out lines of thinking that are less apprehensive about a community basis for policing. For reasons of “effectiveness” in fighting crime and terrorism, a more “hierarchical model” (Ponsaers, 2001, pp. 473-6) of command and control revives with orientations towards defending national security and bigger distances between population and police. This means, the continuation of Dutch policing as pragmatic, social and friendly is under pressure of centralization and penalization, while, at the local level, police forces are sharing responsibilities for safety and security with others. What further consequences the developments will have for the culture and organization of policing, is difficult to foresee precisely. But, it seems more than plausible that it will progressively weaken the “soul” of Dutch police in years to come.

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